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ABSTRACT

A South African ministry invited the Centre for Adult Education in Durban to conduct a nonformal adult educator training course for its staff. During the 10-session course, the adult educators attempted to persuade the ministry staff that although their approach to education, which was based on acceptance rather than questioning and on a single view rather than on multiple perspectives, is adequate for teaching the gospel and instilling faith, it is inappropriate and ineffective for teaching life skills, counseling, and facilitating recovery. The adult educators based their training sessions on three educational strategies: the learner-centered approach, role modeling, and experiential learning activities. The participants' responses to the training sessions were very positive; however, the adult educators who conducted the training concluded that although the ministry staff will likely reproduce mechanically the teaching strategies presented during the training sessions, their attitudes toward teaching will probably remain unchanged for three reasons: the ministers' failure to perceive any need to change their attitude toward teaching, the contradictions between the "secular" methodology of the adult educators and the ministers' dogma-based approach, and the lack of sufficient time to teach the experiential learning approach. (MN)

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and the methodologies which determine the choices they make.

1. The Ministry

The Ministry is geographically situated apart from the main urban area of Durban: it is next to the harbour bay on the one side, and close to the harbour entrance and beaches on the other. It is fringed by vacant land, where marginalised people erect temporary shelters for the night.

It's historical origins were as a municipal compound and architecturally the building has central inner courtyards, surrounded by high dark face-brick buildings. It is physically set apart from it's surroundings by a wall. The only entrance and exit is guarded at all times and people who wish to enter are searched for the 'worldly possessions' which in many cases caused their demise: alcohol, drugs, weapons, sex and rock'n roll. Anyone entering also deposits temporarily his/her personal life and history, and problems of unemployment and homelessness.

Any destitute or homeless person can take up residence. The population 'inside' is multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-lingual, across the spectrum of class. In exchange for free board and lodging, some skills training and child and health care, residents have to commit themselves to the rules of the institution: they have to keep busy, which means helping with the maintenance of the institution and possibly learning a simple trade; they have to keep clean - a daily shower and make-up for the women (sic); they have to abandon habits which are in conflict with Christian life, which means fornication. They also have to sign up for a 50day Bible course. This is to equip them with the tools of a clean Christian life. It is also the great 'leveller' that brings all diversity of background, both in terms of personal and social history, under one roof: it signals the creation of a community with clear reference points and a defined identity.

The world inside is complete: physical needs are taken care of in that residents are allocated a place to sleep, given clothes and ready-made food, their health is checked by a resident nurse and visiting doctors, their life is structured by a clear time-table of daily activities and routines, and a number of reference people who will 'counsel' them should they find it hard to conform. Spiritual needs are taken care of through the doctrine and enforced by rules and regulations. Emotional needs are dealt with through ever-ready quotes from the Bible and encouragement to pray and smile: "Jesus loves you."

Coming from the world outside with it's multitude of demands, choices, responsibilities, and problems the Ministry represents a haven of ordered life. People are given a chance to concentrate on regaining their strength and hope and they are supported by a powerful doctrine which they must experience as practical and workable. After all: any basic needs are met through the power of

providing for the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of the residents, and by removing their need but also ability to make informed choices and decisions, by creating dependencies. (eg through offering child-care to street workers)

Thirdly, in terms of the education offered the transmission model is seductively simple and replicable, but it is also effective for reproduction of information as the history of school teaching shows. Within the Ministry it is uniquely workable: these adults are truly 'empty vessels' having been rid of their personal histories and as yet devoid of other distracting beliefs. A closed discourse that asks no questions and demands nothing beyond adherence to it's rules is very inviting, particularly for people who have failed the system (or the system them), and who are seeking answers, rather than critical analysis, probing thinking and the challenges of contradictory discourses and theories.

Zimbardo et al ask: "Does the power of persuasion lie in the mysterious and unlearnable talents of select individuals, or in the efficacy of the techniques of attitude and behaviour change that these people happen to use?" (Zimbardo et al, p. 49) The teachers in the Ministry are clearly imbued with mysterious talents, because their 'talents' and 'techniques' belong to the Holy Spirit, which speaks and acts through them when they teach.

In the Ministry teaching and learning is unambiguous:

"- The aim of the teacher is to bring Christ into the learners lives;

- Learning happens when the Holy Spirit enters a learner;
- One knows when learning is happening through a change in attitude and a willingness to accept Christ;
- Learners know what and weather they have learned when they feel the Holy Spirit move inside them.
- The learners' behaviour can all be attributed to the lack of Christ in their lives." (Seid, 1992. p.5)

The trump card held in this 'education' process is the evidence which the institution provides of the rewards for conversion: the teachers themselves are living proof and provide the role models for any learners, for were they not all where the learners used to be before receiving Christ in their lives?

The resillience to our various attempts at breaking open the closed discourse and suggestion some small measure of change was remarkable. Not wanting to cause upset we followed Daloz' suggestion that educators can "toss little bits of disturbing information in their students' paths, little facts and observations, theories and interpretations - cow plops on the road to truth - that raise questions about their students' world views and invite them to entertain alternatives, to close the dissonance, accommodate their structures, think afresh." (quoted in: Brookfield, 1987. pg 92)

Every time we introduced bits of contradiction participants

for our choices and actions. Our communicativeness was only reciprocated by some people towards the end of the course - and our success at triggering a multi-perspective view and an openness towards sharing of critical ideas was limited indeed.

One needs to go beyond Brookfield's 'characteristics' in order to answer why we failed as role models. For a start, the characteristics of educators - "the broad repertoire of pedagogic, modelling and interpersonal skills" (ibid p.88) may say something about the practise of an educator, yet very little about the learning. While role modelling had been a conscious strategy in our educational endeavour this may be another case of 'we taught them but they didn't learn'.

In the case of the Ministry course I would assert it was not so much an inadequate role- modelling performance, as an inappropriate context in which it took place. Is it possible to create a dialogical educator within a closed doctrine - discourse? It appears that Brookfield was talking from a context in which he is developing educators who have already been 'converted' to the school of educating for critical thinking. When confronted by those who are buttressed against the school of critical thinking Brookfield's theory would be put to the test, indeed.

Teaching how to teach

There is no recipe for initiating learning based on experience. The numerous graphical models of designing by means of a learning cycle, learning curve or learning spiral all have one seemingly deceptively simple thing in common: they present a model of a process in which experience is turned into learning is via a process of carefully designed and managed reflection.

The reality of teaching people to translate this model into a session design and managing the process is harder. Experiential learning is based on highly skilled trainers/educators, who can lead learners along an intense and often difficult path of review, analysis, reflection, generalisation and finally application. This process cannot be taught in 3 quick and easy steps, but a lot of the skill is developed through experience and practise. It's time consuming to learn how to manage experience-based learning; it demands intensive training which cannot be done on a mass-base. Importantly, it relies on an 'ideology of difference' rather than dogma, and it requires a support network of like-minded people who reinforce the process and at times function as sounding boards.

Unlike the teachers of the doctrine who aim at reproduction our intention was not to produce good disciples nor efficient functionaries of 'the discussion method'. We lacked the necessary time and we were up against another system. Furthermore, we repeatedly pointed out to the coordinator that course participants needed to be given a chance to apply their new skills. But only during his final speech at the end of the course he cheerfully declared: "I purposefully did not tell

rather than question and challenge it.

"to be literate is not simply to know something; it also means knowing how to participate reflectively in the very act of producing knowledge. It also mean learning the limits and partialness of specific languages, cultures, and experiences in terms of both the positive and the negative impacts that they have had and might have in contributing to the construction of a democratic state." (Giroux, 1989.p.xi)

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